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ABSTRACT

Intended to give experience to students hoping to begin careers in advertising and also to serve a neglected segment of advertisers, a specialized senior-level course in small business advertising was developed at Clarion University of Pennsylvania. Early in the semester, lectures and demonstration clients focused on the distinct promotional challenges facing the small, independently-owned business. Small student groups each formed into an agency of specialists, covering the areas of account service, media services, internal control, and creative services. Each student agency (all were named "Becker Hall Associates") then solicited client businesses, prepared extensive case studies on the client, and developed a client contract proposal. Conferences with the professor and script rehearsing ensured that students were prepared for professional-level interaction with clients and media. The final presentation of the plan to each client included a comprehensive package, in some cases including ads ready for insertion in local media, and in all cases with an itemized bill (marked "Courtesy of Clarion University--no charge.") In the three years since the course's inception, students have done well and clients have been pleased. (Seven exhibits are included, comprising students' business cards, introductory and follow-up letters by the professor and the Small Business Development Center, case study guidelines, advertising client questionnaires and scripts, and agency job descriptions. Twenty-nine references are attached.) (SR)

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SMALL BUSINESS ADVERTISING:

A Springboard for Advertising Majors and a Service to the Business Community

by
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Clarion, Pennsylvania

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SMALL BUSINESS ADVERTISING:

A Springboard for Advertising Majors and a Service to the Business Community

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A course devoted to the special challenges of advertising the independently-owned local business gives valuable experience to students hoping to begin careers in advertising and it also serves a neglected segment of advertisers.

The typical new college graduate is not likely to find immediate employment in a major advertising agency, because the usual requirement for hiring by such agencies is at least three to five years of relevant experience. But entry-level jobs are readily available in local media sales and--to a lesser extent--local media production and small, local or regional ad agencies. Students should include these local opportunities in their search for entry-level jobs in advertising in order to get into the advertising career pipeline. Universities can enhance their graduates' chances of "breaking into the field" by offering a course in small business advertising.

By concentrating on the local advertising context and selecting locally-owned business clients, the small business advertising course is able to give students experience with actual clients in real conditions of market and budget, where their ideas will be used. Such a course can allow students to develop insights into clients' priorities and competitive media strategies--skills that will enhance their effectiveness in entry-level media sales jobs as well as in advertising agencies large and small.

A specialized course in small business advertising can be an important complement to the advertising curriculum by connecting advertising students to a point of career entry.

Small businesses are known to be an important phenomenon in the United States economy, with an average of 400,000 new businesses coming into existence every year. In recent years, small business has been providing two out of every three new workers their first jobs. (Pacific Bell/SBA) Effective advertising and promotion may decide the survival of a small business, yet advertising agencies are not eager for the accounts of small, independently-owned businesses, because such accounts are seldom profitable for the agency. Lacking an ad agency, the

small business operator receives his or her advertising expertise from media sales reps, and/or brand-product merchandising kits--Small Business Development Centers on university campuses are able to provide a more objective approach, but may be unable to concentrate a great amount of time on the promotional needs of a single client without curtailing services to other--perhaps competing--clients. The college course in small business advertising, then, can fulfill the agency function for many independently-owned local businesses without fear of infringing on free trade of advertising agencies or duplicating services already being offered by the Small Business Development Center.

A concern is that both clients and students perceive the proper value of the service provided the small business by the course, perhaps at little or no cost to the client. Clients are more likely to place credence in their "agency" if they are apprised of the fees usually charged for advertising services. Even more important in the instructional situation is that students realize the market value of their skills. Care must be taken to ensure that students be able to perform professionally from the outset to the completion of their relationship with the client.

Thus, a senior-level professional course, COMM 415, was developed at Clarion University of Pennsylvania.

COURSE FORMAT:

Students were put into groups early in the course, with peers who had similar expectations for the course. For example, one group consisted of six students who intended to open small businesses after leaving college. Another group was comprised of students highly motivated towards advertising agency careers. A third group contained students who intended the course to complement other areas of specialization, etc. The course typically enrolls approximately 40 students in one section.

Each student group formed itself into a team of specialists under the name, Becker Hall Associates, with one or more students in the following job titles: Account Service, Media Services, Internal Control, and Creative Services. Students were given a supply of their own business cards. (Exibit 1.) Each student was encouraged to select a function through which he or she might use the course to further develop and showcase professional talents.

Once formed, the groups were briefed on points with which to solicit client businesses. The first contact with the business operator outlined the minimum services to be performed by the agency and the approximate cost to the client in time and money. Prospects were screened to avoid competing accounts and to eliminate any business already under an existing agency agreement. Priority was given to family businesses of class members. The six or seven clients chosen per semester represented a spectrum of local retail, service, and manufacturing enterprises, with advertising budgets ranging from $1000 to $30,000 per year.

Two follow-up contacts were made by mail to confirm selection of each business client of the course. The first letter was from the professor of the course, and it formally described the agency/client relationship about to begin. (Exhibit 2.) The second letter was sent by the Small Business Development Center affiliated with Clarion University; its purpose was to reinforce the credibility of the project from a position of authority. (Exhibit 3.)

With client obtained, each student agency then embarked upon research. The agencies prepared a case study (Exhibit 4) of their client business, along with a rough draft of a contract proposal to be presented as a class report for input from classmates and evaluation by the professor. The case study included a situational analysis, a history of the client's promotional efforts and expenditures, marketing objectives for the coming year, and the agency's proposed advertising objectives and strategies. Appendices to the case studies were required, including:

a. Demographic and sales data for the product category to compare with information supplied by the client;
b. Media rates and data for the client's market area;
c. Outline of the contract proposal being prepared for the client, with the agency's contract for a project grade of A, B, or C, and a time line for remaining tasks;
d. An itemized list of ready-to-run ads to be produced for the client, with resources and talent listed and production budget billable to the client. (Appendix d was required only of groups contracting for a project grade of A.)

Conferences with the professor ensured that students were prepared for professional-level interaction with clients and media; scripts were rehearsed for this purpose. (Exhibit 5.) Although agency members (usually six students to a group) worked together on everything, final responsibility for specialized tasks adhered to job description. (Exhibit 6.)

In developing the client contract proposal, agencies were guided by the professor to promise only as much as they could guarantee accomplishing within their own parameters of time and professional goals. The agency's contract with the professor for the project grade meant that the group was virtually assured of the contract grade if the conditions of the proposal were accepted (signified by the signatures of the client and the professor,) and fulfilled by the agency.

With professionalism of uppermost concern, students needed the security of "walking through" the project before being sent off to serious engagement with the client. For this purpose, a class demonstration client was invited in. This was a business with unusual promotional needs, so selected in order to make students stretch their imaginations for valid solutions. In each instance, the demonstration client was known to be a friend of the University, willing to attend two class sessions, and needing relatively little help. After interviewing the demonstration

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client, each agency prepared an abbreviated situational analysis and proposal for presentation to the client on his/her second visit to class.

Once students were de-briefed on the demonstration client, they were prepared to proceed with their agency's client. The entire second half of the course schedule was allotted to this project, with class periods pre-scheduled by turns with the professor for strategy sessions and progress reports.

As one might surmise, the first part of the course had been taken up with content, including the distinct promotional challenges facing the small, independently-owned business, how its media use must differ from that of retail chains and franchises, and how to exploit all available promotional tools, regardless of budget. Most students enrolled in Comm 415 have taken other advertising and marketing courses, and so they know quite a bit of the conventional wisdom and technical processes of national advertising; a concern of Comm 415 is to make students re-examine learned principles for validity in the local advertising context.

An enjoyable and useful segment of Comm 415 was a series of three, three-day creative workshops: newspaper advertising design, radio commercial scripting, and direct-mail planning and design. These were judged to be a necessary part of the local advertising course, because sales reps of local media customarily assist the client in conceptualization of advertising messages to be produced as part of the contract with the medium. These creative workshops could be optional in programs where specialized courses are available.

A few days before the end of the course, each agency had a dress rehearsal of its client presentation in front of class members. Once again, input was invited, giving agencies the opportunity to make last-minute improvements before officially presenting the package to the client.

The final presentation of the plan to each client was done with only the agency, the client, and the professor present. A small conference room was scheduled at the University, and students took pains to create a business-like ambiance in the room. It was an essential consideration that the client be able to come to campus for the final presentation: this gave the students a subtle assist to their authority by allowing them to control the presentation on their own turf.

The client received a comprehensive package, including an itemized bill. The comprehensive package consisted of the situational analysis, marketing objectives, advertising objectives, advertising strategies, media plan with media budget, and message strategies. Those student agencies which had agreed to create ads ready for insertion in local media also included broadcast-quality tapes for radio, camera-ready newspaper layouts, etc. (The student agencies made no agreements with the local media for purchases of time or space.) By prior arrangement with the client, out-of-pocket expenses incurred by the agency and pre-authorized by the client were to be reimbursed

at or before the scheduled presentation. All other expenses, though billed, were marked, "Courtesy of Clarion University--no charge." Students each kept a copy of the presentation package, and submitted a copy for grading. A follow-up courtesy letter was sent to each client by the professor, marking the termination of the project. (Exhibit 7.)

GRADING:

The following items were averaged for the final course grade:

a. Case study;
b. Media rates and data; demographic and sales data;
c. Test on course lecture material;
d. Attendance;
e. Peer evaluation of client package presented at dress rehearsal;
f. Professor's evaluation of client package.

COURSE EVALUATION:

Not surprisingly, students performed well in Comm 415; course grades were skewed high. This is no doubt due to the great degree of control students had over the quality of their performance, enhanced by the desire to be professionally effective with the client.

More important than grades, students developed an awareness of their own marketable skills, and the security of earned self-esteem. This has been particularly gratifying to see in those students of lesser academic brilliance and lesser assertiveness.

Since its inception three years ago, the course in local advertising has served 22 area clients with services worth many thousands of dollars. Clients have been pleased. By restricting the service to independently-owned local businesses that do not have an advertising agency, the course avoids drawing charges of unfair competition. Important to the professor is the fact that, once organized, the agency system is not overly time-consuming to direct.

Alumni have used the credentials developed in Comm 415 to obtain positions in full-service advertising agencies, and in media companies as sales reps and advertising producers.

A course in local advertising can be the link between the university advertising program and the segment of the local business community that most needs help, and it can provide a point of entry for many advertising students who might otherwise be lost to the field.

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Clarion University of Pennsylvania
Clarion PA 16214 Phone 226-2328

Account Service

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Media Services

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Internal Control

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Creative Services

Department of Communication

Dear

It is a pleasure to welcome you as one of this year's clients of Becker Hall Associates.

A group of students under my direction in Comm 415 Local Advertising will work very hard to prepare an advertising plan for you to follow throughout the coming year. The students will come to you for guidance in clearly identifying the year's business objectives, describing your business's recent history and market niche, and establishing a realistic advertising budget.

In selecting your business to be our client, we have taken care not to choose any other business that is in competition with yours. I think you will be pleased with the package the students will give you at the end of the course, when you come to campus for their presentation. At the very least, it will save you precious time in the year to come.

This service will be free of charge to you, except for out-of-pocket expenditures on which students will get your prior approval.

For your convenience, I can be reached at (814)226-2538 on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 1:00 p.m. to 2:45 p.m.

Yours truly,

Patricia Marini
Associate Professor

Exhibit 3
Page iii

March 14, 1987

Mr. Joseph Williams
Jefferson Real Estate Co.
267 Main Street
Brookville, PA 15825

Dear Mr. Williams:

I have recently been informed by Professor Patricia Marini that you were selected as an advertising client by her class this semester. It is my understanding that her students will plan and budget your advertising for a year, in line with your marketing objectives, as a free service by the class.

Professor Marini is one of our regular speakers at SBDC semin rs, and we refer clients to her for consultation on adver sing. Although this project is not part of the Small Business Development Center, we recognize it as a valuable opportunity for the businesses chosen.

The vitality of small business in our area is important to all of us, and we hope this project will have beneficial results.

Sincerely,

Woodrow W. Yeaney
Director, SBDC

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CASE STUDY

Parts 1-5 due for class presentation: _____
Parts 1-7 due to Ms. Marini: _____

1. **Situational analysis.** This is a review of the product/business strengths in the competitive marketplace, and the opportunities that exist to increase or maintain sales. Here you reiterate the information obtained in the ADVERTISING CLIENT QUESTIONNAIRE. Your own observations and primary research may be included, if verified by the client.

2. **Promotional history.** Collect samples of advertising and promotion done by the client in the past year or so, and attach annotations to the samples regarding cost and results, as told to you by the client. Include in this section the client's response to MEDIA MASTERMIND. Analyze the promotional history for strengths and weaknesses, based on your expertise as an ad agency.

3. **Marketing objective(s).** State the marketing objectives you intend to support with your group project. Be careful here: commit yourselves only to those objectives that can be served by a single, one-year advertising plan. It's all right to have only one marketing objective. Include in this section the identification of consumer target group(s) and the promotional budget limit.

4. **Advertising objectives.** State what you expect advertising to achieve for the business in the coming year. Objectives by definition are measurable. Suggest ways in which the business owner can keep track of the effectiveness of the advertising. It may not be possible for reliable conclusions to be drawn regarding effectiveness of your agency's plan in the first year, unless data had been gathered last year, but you can suggest a data-collection plan.

Recommend media (e. g. newspaper) and describe how each medium can help achieve the marketing objective(s) by itself and in combination with other media choices. Briefly explain goals of reach, frequency, and continuity in layman's terms and tie them into budgetary considerations.

5. **Copy plan.** Make a comprehensive list of the messages that will be conveyed throughout the promotional activities of the coming year. If necessary, clarify the intended audiences.

6. Contract proposal. Outline in sentence form the contents of the advertising plan to be presented to the client at the end of the course. Include parts 1-5, above. Additional parts of the document will include a year's media plan with budget and prices, and a creative package.

NOTE: Groups contracting for a project grade of B or C will prepare a creative package consisting of scripts, roughs, and storyboards of ads for each medium named in the plan.
Groups contracting for a project grade of A will prepare a creative package consisting of professional quality ads ready for placement in the named media.

The contract proposal must also have an itemized list of reimbursible costs, such as gas, postage, and production supplies, if the agency needs to incur these expenses.

On the contract proposal, type lines for the client and the professor to sign and date the proposal, and to indicate approval. Make copies for the client, professor, and group members.

7. Appendices. Submit with case study:

a. Target demographic data and category sales data obtained from library research.

b. Media rates and data for client's market area. (Use MEDIA INTERVIEW to obtain.)

c. Timeline of tasks remaining after CASE STUDY presentation.

d. (Required only of groups contracting for a project grade of A.)
List of resources and talent for production of creative package.

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ADVERTISING CLIENT QUESTIONNAIRE
Date of Interview _____

Business Name _____

Address _____ Phone _____

Advertising decisions made by _____

Type of Business _____

1. List those major brands you handle which offer a cooperative advertising program. Include address of manufacturer.

2. What are the main reasons customers buy from you rather than from your competitors?

3. Name, describe, and assess your competition.

4. Why do customers patronize your competition?

5. What sales areas can provide increased income without proportionally increased business costs?

6. Where will your future growth/profitability come from?

   a. Creating users out of non-users?
   b. Winning customers from competitors?
   c. Increasing volume or frequency of use?
   d. Expanding into other markets?
   e. Changing your product line?
   f. Decreasing business costs?

   Explain

7. Describe the customer who accounts for the majority of your business income. Include demographics, geographic location, lifestyle, buying style.

8. Describe the customer who accounts for the next largest share of your income.

9. Are there any other selling points for your business? (certifications, services, toll-free lines, etc.).

10. Describe the trade area you can serve cost-effectively.

_____

_____

_____

11. Describe seasonal or other fluctuations in your business.

_____

_____

12. List any events, anniversaries, etc., you plan to promote in the coming year. Give dates and importance to profitability.

_____

_____

_____

13. Name the advertising media you have used in the past (year). Which have been most effective? How do you know?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

14. Check the range of advertising budget you feel is realistic for your business for next year.

a. $600 - $1200 _____

b. $1300 - $3000 _____

c. $3100 - $6000 _____

d. $6100 - $10,000 _____

e. $11,000- $20,000 _____

f. $20,000- _____

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MEDIA MASTERMIND

Are you confused about which advertising media you should put your money into? This little exercise may help you make the right decision for your business.

For each question, circle the answer that best describes your situation. It is OK to circle more than one answer.

1. Who, mainly, buys your product or service?

   a. Males and females under 25
   b. Males and females aged 26 to 45
   c. Males and females aged 46 and older
   d. Females aged 46 and older
   e. A group not described above

2. How often does a person buy the kinds of things you sell?

   a. Frequently--several times per month or several times per week
   b. Regularly--several times per year at predictable times or seasons
   c. Regularly, but at times that vary with the individual customer
   d. Occasionally--at unpredictable times
   e. Rarely--on a few occasions in a lifetime

3. How much money can you spend annually on advertising and promotion?

   a. Under $500
   b. Between $500 and $1000
   c. Between $1000 and $3000
   d. Between $3000 and $12,000
   e. Between $12,000 and $30,000

4. Compared to your main competition, are you...

   a. A lot better known?
   b. About equally well known?
   c. Not as well known?
   d. Unknown?

5. Why do people buy from you rather than from your competitors?

   a. I have lower prices
   b. My store is convenient for the customer (location, extensive stock, etc.)
   c. I enjoy a long-standing good reputation
   d. I carry brands and/or styles that are in demand by my customers
   e. Other

6. What size radius do you draw most of your customers from?

   a. Within ½ mile
   b. Within 5 miles
   c. Within 20 miles
   d. Beyond 20 miles

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MEDIA INTERVIEW (Telephone)

Company _____ Phone _____

Address _____

Location _____

Hello, this is _____ from Becker Hall Associates Advertising Agency. Can you tell me the name of the person in change of advertising sales? (Write it here; get the correct spelling and pronunciation) _____

_____

Hello, Mr./Ms. _____, I'm _____ from Becker Hall Associates. I represent a student-run advertising agency operating out of Clarion University under Professor Pat Marini. Could you take a few minutes to give me some information about advertising in _____

_____?

1. Is (above) the correct address of your company?
2. Where exactly are you located?
3. What kind of production is included with a client's ad contract at no extra charge?
4. What format do you want from the client?
5. Are custom production services available?
6. Do you have a published rate card? Does it include closing times and mechanical requirements?
7. Can you give me a list of type faces and sizes you have available? (Print media only.)
8. Do you give agency discounts for ads that are ready-to-run?
9. Do you have a sales rep in Clarion? _____

_____ Phone _____

Thanks Mr./Ms. _____, You've been very helpful. Will you please send me a copy of _____.

I'll give you my name and address. That's _____

Media Services, Becker Hall Associates _____

_____, Clarion University, Clarion, PA 16214.

I hope you'll be able to send that out right away. We're going to need that information for media planning for some local businesses we've taken on as clients.

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AGENCY JOB DESCRIPTIONS

ACCOUNT SERVICE: Liaison between the agency/university and the client.

1. Sets up appointments with the client and notifies other group members, if necessary.
2. Secures approvals/signatures of client and professor when needed.
3. Ensures that communication between client and agency/university is clear at all times.
4. Ensures that the client's needs are met by the work of the agency.
5. Maintains client's confidence in the agency.
6. Sees that the final product is delivered to all intended persons.
7. Keeps a log of time spent, and reports it to Internal Control.

MEDIA SERVICES: Media research, media selection, media spending, and media scheduling.

1. Compiles rates and data for local media in client's market area.
2. Coordinates with media service persons in other groups to share media rates and data for clients in the same market area.
3. Makes effective media selections to connect advertising objectives, messages, and targets.
4. Budgets media expenditures to achieved desired effects of frequency and continuity cost-effectively.
5. Justifies media decisions to the client.
6. Keeps a log of time spent, and reports it to Internal Control.

CREATIVE SERVICES: Conceptualizes and produces ads and agency promotional presentations.

1. Writes advertising copy that achieves the stated objectives.
2. Prepares scripts, roughs, and storyboards of ads.
3. Produces or oversees the production of professional-quality ads, if group has contracted for a project grade of A.
4. Makes duplicate copies of ads, if needed.
5. Budgets and purchases production supplies (with prior signed approval of client.)
6. Produces or oversees the production of audiovisual presentation materials.
7. Keeps a log of time spent, and receipts for all purchases, and gives these to Internal Control.

INTERNAL CONTROL: Keeps the project on schedule and within budget. Handles billing, collection, and disbursement.

1. Prepares a time line in consultation with other agency departments.
2. Ensures that deadlines are met by workers.
3. Routes work through various departments inside the agency, and outside if applicable.
4. Gives periodic progress reports to the professor.
5. Keeps a log of time spent.
6. Collects time logs and purchase receipts from other agency departments.
7. Prepares a 2-part bill for client:
   a. Billing for time spent by agency (to be marked "Courtesy of Clarion University--no charge.")
   b. Reimbursible out-of-pocket expenses incurred by agency.
8. Collects payment from client and makes disbursements.

Department of Communication

Dear

Thank-you for being a client of Becker Hall Associates this year. Your participation in my course, Comm 415 Local Advertising, has enabled students to apply their knowledge to a real-world situation, and thus gain skills that will be important to them as they enter careers in advertising.

I hope you enjoyed the association with your student ad agency. More important, I hope you will be able to see results of the project at the cash register!

Best wishes for continued success for you and your business.

Yours truly,

Patricia Marini
Associate Professor